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America's New Tyrant. The Chauffeur.

The Richest Men Appear to Have Become Slaves of the Motor Driver

AMERICA, the land of the free, etc., has a new tyrant. He is the chauffeur. Like all autocrats, he has many virtues, and he confers many boons, when he is in his best estate.

But, in his worst, he rules his subject people with a rod of iron; and from his power, used for weal or woe, there appears to be no escape.

Europe, land of effete nobility and of hapless peasants, has its chauffeurs prone under the chassis, groveling without a thought of rebellion, and biting the dust every few minutes just to show they're tamed beyond the last spark of resentment.

America's new tyrant lords it over the auto, the roadway, the owner, and the general population.

The difference is so vast that it has become dismay. The consequences have become so huge that the question is being continually debated, Why?

Why is the United States, as a whole, at the mercy of the new Oligarchy of the Chauffeurs?

BECAUSE, reply the members of one contingent, the really excellent chauffeur is like the woman for whom the Scriptures reserve their loftiest encomium—a pearl beyond price, a possession above rubies.

Because, reply others, the owners of motors are so utterly careless of their own rights and so indulgent of the chauffeur's privileges, that practically no rights remain and all privileges have become prerogatives.

Because, still others affirm, the owners themselves are so little fit to be masters in their own house, that their chauffeurs are largely their dictators, the nominal masters being actually afraid to administer the rebukes which alone can effect emancipation from the yoke.

As for the public and the public's opinion, great as the automobile industry has grown to be, and numerous as are its patrons, all motorists recognize the fact that no development in locomotion can proceed in a manner wholly irrespective of existing conditions; and the large majority recognize the desirability of maintaining the entente cordiale with the pedestrian population at as high a level as their Pegasus will admit.

Nor is it a fact that the chauffeur, as a class, is given over to the tyranny for which he is becoming notorious. Owners are far more numerous responsible for the usurpation of public roadways; and those chauffeurs who do emulate their masters on their own hook are emphatically in the minority.

But the sensational features of the escapades indulged in by those chauffeurs who are prone to assume all the license that is forbidden to owners have brought upon the entire craft the odium of blame for universal tyranny such as has attached to no other body of Americans, even in politics.

The first, and most objectionable, invasion

of public and private rights is the now notorious "joy ride," already legislated against in several states with special laws made necessary by the habitual reluctance of owners to employ ordinary precautions and to act under the common law.

The motor car is still too recent a factor in our civilization for the assemblage of reliable, general statistics, except on the most haphazard scale; and "joy riding," as a special factor in accidents, is an element that has come into prominence so lately that there are no statistics at all.

As early as three years ago, in New York city, a four months' comparison showed twelve killed and sixty-one injured in auto accidents, against only thirty-one killed and 322 injured by all the horse-drawn vehicles of the great city, and ninety-seven killed and 173 injured by all its street cars.

CAUSE MANY ACCIDENTS

The percentage of those auto accidents that was due to the heedlessness of drivers other than their owners cannot even be guessed at, any more than the total number of "joy rides" can be surmised in comparison with the runs made by cars occupied by the persons who have a right to be in them.

Even at that time, Winthrop E. Scarritt, formerly president of the Automobile Club of America, declared that careful investigation would prove four-fifths of all fatal accidents due to irresponsible chauffeurs.

The "joy ride" is the inveterate foe of statistics, for the very essence of its astonishing extension, as a practice, has been evasion of owners' wishes by the offending chauffeurs and complete indifference to the chauffeurs' actions on the part of owners. Throughout, it has been a case of either nobody knows, or nobody

cares, or both.

But the individual tragedies which have been incident to "joy riding" have startled every large community with such frequent repetition that the term has already become synonymous with a recklessness which falls short of homicide only when it is suicidal.

In the public imagination, the irresponsible chauffeur looms up like a man, drunk with some occult drug, seizing upon a modern war chariot of irresistible power and driving it madly onward and onward, running amuck over highways and byways until disaster intervenes.

Those disasters have been appallingly numerous. Their various measures of blame have ranged from cases where the chauffeur was only slightly reprehensible to where he was absolutely reckless. Often, if not usually, by some peculiar fitness of punishment, the chauffeur has been among those who paid most heavily for the rashness.

Such a disaster was that which occurred three years ago in New York, when the term "joy riding" had not yet been coined. Edward H. Graves, of South Orange, owned a 40-horsepower touring car. His chauffeur, Arthur Dodge, took a party of half a dozen men to the Empire City race track, saw the races, had dinner at a road house, and "whooped things" up to a dizzying rate of speed on the return, towards midnight.

On Jerome avenue, passing Woodlawn Cemetery, where the road turns sharply, Dodge, knowing the turn perfectly well, disregarded the obvious precaution of applying his brakes. The tires failed to hold; and the machine, skidding furiously, hurled itself against a trolley pole. The seven men were scarcely soaring into the air when the tank of gasoline exploded with terrific force, leaving the car in fragments and setting them on fire.

One of Dodge's friends was dead; all the others were unconscious. Dodge himself had his right leg and three ribs broken.

Early last summer Mrs. C. J. Smith, of New York, engaged to be married, was in a wedding dress, returning from a shopping trip, observed that her chauffeur was wet with the rain. She told him to return to the Gould garage, where the car was usually kept, change his clothing, and then take the auto at once to a repair shop, because the top leaked.

The chauffeur, instead, invited a party of his friends to take a ride with him. He declared, afterward, that the brake failed to work. It was late in the afternoon when the car was seen rushing down West Fifty-sixth street, veering helplessly hither and yon, yet making steadily toward the North river.

As it reached the stringpiece of the wharf one of the men jumped, landing safely, and ran away. All the others went down with the machine into the river; and all, except the driver, were drowned. The chauffeur, carried down with it, was the only one able to free himself and swim to the pier.

One of the most terrible tragedies known in the history of "joy riding" was that which first centered public attention upon the now common evil. It contained all the features characteristic of the practice in its most aggravated form, from the hilarity with which it began to the horrible deaths in which it ended.

A TERRIBLE ATONEMENT

At 11 o'clock on an October night four years ago Albert Noyes, a chauffeur, drew up at the doors of the Riverside Casino, in the dance resort near New York known as Little Coney Island. He drank with a party of men and women whom he met in the hall; about midnight, four men and five women piled into the big red automobile and started a noisy, mad race for the Bronx.

Swift as the pace was, it was interrupted again and again for additional drinks at road-houses, until the route neared the old Malcolm dam bridge, at 161st street, near Jerome and Sedgewick avenues.

From Jerome avenue a blind road led that ended at the railroad embankment, a city precipice over a railway cut, amply guarded for all ordinary needs with a stout paling fence. Thirty feet below lay the southbound track; 200 feet above the bridge stands the signal tower.

Noyes swung the big, powerful machine into the blind road and buried it, like the projectile from some enormous gun, straight at the paling fence guarding the cliff. The impact tore a breach in it half way across its length; but so staunchly had the fence been built that it sufficed to check the flight of the car through the air into which its chauffeur had launched it.

A timber fence, and it must have leaped far enough in its fall to clear the southbound tracks below. Checked as it was, it dropped to the ground, the full thirty feet, directly upon the rails.

The towerman, at the tumult of shrieks that followed the crash, acted with lightning-like quickness. He set the signal against the Croton local express, due to pass in less than a minute's time. But it was too late.

SURVIVORS MERE WRECKS

The express, its way barely lessened at the flash of the signal light, thundered down upon the doomed party. The chauffeur, caught up with the wreck of his machine, was found dead on the engine's pilot when the train came to a stop. One woman, dragged by her long automobile coat 200 feet, was then dropped under the train wheels and cut exactly in half.

Three of the party, in all, were corpses when the train halted, one of them Noyes, the others women. The rest were more or less mangled, yet able to survive, mere wrecks of the humanity they had been when they embarked upon the mad, clamorous dash from the dance hall.

Owners who have had the self-assertion and the moral courage to set their faces sternly against liberties taken by their chauffeurs are few. In Pittsburgh, James H. Beal, formerly law partner of Senator Knox, had a chauffeur who ran over and killed a boy. The man was arrested, but could have been admitted to bail. Mr. Beal had made inquiries, and felt convinced that the killing was an accident. Nevertheless, he refused to go bail for his chauffeur.

"I am satisfied that there is too much carelessness by chauffeurs," he explained. "Here a life has been lost, and some one was to blame. So far as I am concerned, my chauffeur will remain in jail on the charge of murder until he is cleared by the court."

When Frank C. Foote, the chauffeur of James J. Hill, the railroad magnate, helped himself to his employer's 50-horsepower Mercedes and killed a woman while speeding on his way to one of the New York courts for trial for exceeding the speed limit on a previous

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